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PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT IN THE EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC REGION

The present document analyses major new trends and developments of UNICEF programme cooperation in the East Asia and Pacific region during 1991.

The UNICEF regional office has responsibilities for UNICEF cooperation in the following countries and Territories: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam and the countries in the Pacific region (Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu).

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I. REGIONAL OVERVIEW

1. In 1991, regional- and country-level follow-up to the World Summit for Children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child created a greater awareness of the situation of children and women.

2. On 23 October, a peace agreement ending the 12-year civil war in Cambodia was signed in Paris, giving hope for real peace and development. Following a bloodless coup in February 1991, a new constitution is now under discussion in Thailand and elections have been promised for early in 1992. Apart from these two major political events, Governments have either remained in place or peaceful changes have occurred, providing relatively stable government throughout the region. The situation in Myanmar continues without change. After years of uncertainty, the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were admitted as Members of the United Nations in September 1991.

3. As the economies of socialist countries in the region shift from centrally planned to mixed market-oriented systems, more foreign investment is being encouraged through business reform and the deregulation of local markets. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the "New Economic Mechanism" has opened the economy to Thai, Japanese, French and other investors. In Viet Nam, a new foreign investment law has led to the approval of 253 joint ventures worth $1.96 billion.

4. With some exceptions, economic growth in the region has been robust: 10 per cent in Malaysia; 9 per cent in Thailand; 9 per cent in the Republic of Korea; and 5.6 per cent in Indonesia. The overall forecast for economic growth in the region is a buoyant 6.7 per cent, which should give the new industrialized countries fully developed economies by the end of the century.

5. China experienced its worst flooding in 50 years, but still managed a grain output that was the second highest ever. It had a trade surplus of $8 billion by August 1991. One of China's main economic concerns is the disparity of growth between provinces and between rural, urban and remote areas.

6. Inflation appears to be under control in the market economies of the region, but it is posing problems in the socialist economies because of the combined effects of increased oil prices, the global recession and the transition from planned to market economies.

7. Despite the favourable economic climate in most countries of the region, large numbers of families remain below the poverty line. Their numbers have increased in China, the Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Pacific island countries, but have decreased in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Republic of Korea. The outlook for the next year is favourable, but with inflation rising continually in the less developed countries, more families are likely to fall below the poverty line.

II. PROGRAMME PROGRESS AND TRENDS

A. Child survival and development priorities

8. Infant mortality rates have declined in all countries, ranging from an annual rate of reduction of 0.5 per cent in Malaysia to 5.7 per cent for Thailand for the decade 1980-1990. Following the achievement of universal child immunization (UCI) in the vast majority of the countries of the region, which has improved the infrastructure for the overall delivery of child survival and development (CSD) services, other health initiatives such as the safe motherhood and "baby-friendly" hospital initiatives are now being advocated.

9. The achievement of UCI has posed some challenges in the region. In Myanmar, as of April 1991, the third dose of combined diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus vaccine (DPT3) and of oral polio vaccine (OPV3) reached 88 per cent coverage, but measles coverage still needs to be increased. In Papua New Guinea, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Cambodia, there have been serious efforts to achieve UCI despite the many constraints facing those countries. On the other hand, China has achieved 97 per cent coverage for DPT3 and 98 per cent for OPV3. Reviews of the expanded programme on immunization have been conducted in China and Thailand. The weighted average coverage for the region as a whole is 92 per cent for DPT3, 94 per cent for OPV3 and 92 per cent for measles vaccine.

10. Conventional activities of the control of diarrhoeal disease (CDD) programme were pursued in all countries of the region. In addition, in countries such as Indonesia and Viet Nam, the "social marketing" approach (using marketing techniques to transmit messages with a social content) for more effective use of oral rehydration therapy (ORT) was rigorously applied with good results. In Viet Nam, it has been calculated that some 64.4 per cent of the population now use ORT, making that country one of the most successful in implementing the CDD programme. Despite the progress achieved, in some countries there still remains a gap between accessibility and actual use of ORT.

11. Together with diarrhoeal diseases, acute respiratory infections (ARI) account for about 50 per cent of deaths among children under five years old in the region. Countries such as Viet Nam, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines have now developed extensive programmes and are working towards national coverage. Thailand, which has been selected for an intensified ARI-control programme, has also been carrying out operational research studies in the use of drugs for ARI to support the national programme.

12. The acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic continues to spread in many countries of the region, notably in Thailand. According to unofficial estimates, the number of people who have tested positive for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in Thailand alone could well reach 1 million by the year 2000. In Myanmar and Malaysia, transmission has been mainly through intravenous drug users. On the positive side, all countries

have taken very serious steps to contain the problem, including the formation of high-level committees, extensive blood testing for HIV, information, education and communication campaigns directed towards high-risk groups, and the provision of counselling services. In Thailand, direct action is now being pursued by the Prime Minister's office and by the Ministry of Health, including monthly donor meetings to mobilize additional resources.

B. Nutrition

13. The rate of protein-energy malnutrition continues to decline in the region. In Thailand, for example, according to the latest available information, the prevalence of moderate and severe protein-energy malnutrition is less than 1 per cent. The regional office has been advocating the use of a comparable standard (weight-for-age) among the countries of the region.

14. In collaboration with the Mahidol University Institute of Nutrition (Bangkok), the International Development Research Centre and the World Health Organization (WHO), a workshop was held to assess community nutrition training needs in Asia. During the second half of 1991 significant advocacy efforts were undertaken to promote breast-feeding and the "baby-friendly" hospital concept, particularly in Thailand and the Philippines.

C. Safe motherhood

15. The safe motherhood concept gained further momentum as a result of regional workshops and seminars supported by country-level advocacy. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Cambodia and Mongolia, the concepts of family health and birth-spacing have begun to be accepted by the Governments concerned.

D. Women in development and the girl child

16. In many countries in the region, women's groups continued to play a leading role in promoting women in development activities. In China, the All China Women's Federation has conducted many skills training courses, which incorporated Facts for Life messages, to support income-generating activities for women cadres. The Lao Women's Union has strengthened the development of a network of women community workers at the local level to promote CSD interventions. The Women's Association of Cambodia has implemented various activities to improve women's living conditions through income-generation, functional literacy and child-care programmes. UNICEF also supported revolving funds for women's income-generating activities in many countries in the region. In Indonesia, UNICEF continued to support the Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga (family welfare movement) by strengthening the managerial skills of its subdistrict organizers. In Cambodia, small interest-free loans were given to women to expand or improve ongoing economic activities by setting up small businesses such as arts and crafts and family food production.

17. In general, boys and girls in the region have equal access to primary education. However, among minority ethnic groups, and those located in remote areas in countries such as the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia, China and Viet Nam, girls are less likely than boys to attend school. Problems of early marriage and teenage pregnancy still exist in Myanmar, Indonesia and the Philippines. Girls are more exposed to child abuse.

E. Basic education

18. Increased attention is being given to various aspects of basic and non-formal education, particularly the qualitative aspects, as a follow-up to the World Declaration on Education for All and accompanying framework for action. Overall, there has been an increasing shift towards providing more assistance for training and management and less for equipment. UNICEF assistance contributed to the preparation of the Philippines National Plan of Action for Education for All and to the Cambodian Education for All National Conference. UNICEF has undertaken discussions about assisting education projects for the first time in Malaysia and Papua New Guinea and about increasing its assistance to include activities for improving the quality of basic education in remote areas in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

19. In Cambodia, UNICEF is providing technical assistance to undertake research on causes of wastage in primary schools. In the Philippines, UNICEF projects employ an integrated approach to improve child health and reduce drop-outs from primary school. In Myanmar and Viet Nam, projects to improve learning assessment and the quality of basic education are being pursued. UNICEF activities in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia and China addressed training in planning and management to help improve system efficiency. The development of instructional materials and teacher training was assisted in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and China.

20. In Thailand, UNICEF supported the establishment of community learning centres attached to primary schools to provide continuing non-formal learning opportunities for neo-literates. UNICEF also supported an Indonesian non-formal education programme designed to combine literacy acquisition with income-generating activities, especially for women. UNICEF activities in early childhood education continued in most countries of the region. Both Myanmar and Viet Nam, for example, are implementing projects on community-based child-care centres that provide support and training for local mothers to establish and manage day-care centres.

F. Children in especially difficult circumstances

21. In several countries of the region, concerns relating to child workers and child abuse, neglect, abandonment and prostitution are increasingly being recognized as critical social issues. Malaysia, in the wake of a dramatic increase in cases of child abuse and neglect, enacted the 1991 Child Protection Act, which, inter alia, outlines a clear series of child rights.

In Thailand and the Philippines, research findings and technical meetings have brought into focus the problems and needs of children in difficult circumstances and the need for policy and programme action. In several countries, regional networks and support for information exchange encouraged by UNICEF have made important contributions towards policy, legal and programming responses from government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). An active regional NGO supported by UNICEF, Child Workers in Asia, continues to play an important networking and information support role.

G. External relations

22. There were two high points in the regional office's external relations programme in 1991: the organization of the regional consultation on follow-up to the World Summit for Children, held at Bangkok in July; and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) ministerial-level meeting on social development, held at Manila in October. At the former, high-level ministerial delegations from 11 Asian countries reaffirmed their commitment to the Summit goals by submitting work plans for the completion of national programmes of action by the end of 1991. The report of the latter, the "Manila Declaration", contained clear references to the Summit Declaration and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The keynote address of the UNICEF Executive Director at the Manila meeting gave a high profile to the cause of children in the region.

23. In the several rapidly industrializing countries of Asia (Malaysia, the Republic of Korea and Thailand), external relations is expanding to include fund-raising and building new alliances among research, education and strategic studies institutions.

24. During 1991, 14 countries in the region had ratified or acceded to the Convention, which is considered a framework for national programmes of action to reach the Summit goals. The Philippines has mobilized advocates and women lawyers to draft ideal legislation for the implementation of the Convention, while Viet Nam, Myanmar and Thailand are assessing the state of their legislation in relation to the Convention. Regional exchanges of experience on issues related to implementation and monitoring of the Convention are receiving increased attention, and regional consultations on these issues are planned for early 1992.

H. Summit follow-up

25. Most countries in the region are in the preliminary stages of preparing national programmes of action, with five countries already well advanced (China, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam). In all countries in the region, the programmes are expected to have a positive impact on national policy-making and to become an integral part of development planning.

26. Countries in the region have already established institutions for monitoring the achievement of Summit goals. In China, the National Coordinating Committee for Children and Women plans to hold nationwide progress review meetings every three years to share experiences and information, evaluate progress and recommend further actions. Indonesia has incorporated the goals' indicators into its national socio-economic survey of 100,000 households and into a health survey of 50,000 households. The Republic of Korea will involve local NGOs and universities in monitoring. UNICEF assistance to Malaysia is expected to include cooperation on the monitoring of child welfare goals. Thailand continues with its "basic minimum needs" system to monitor annually conditions in all villages. Viet Nam plans to hold an annual summit for children. Many countries still have to designate a specific government institution to monitor the Summit goals, but some countries have specified the institutions. Indonesia has designated the Minister Coordinator for People's Welfare; Malaysia, the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Office; Thailand, the National Youth Bureau, Office of the Prime Minister; Viet Nam, the Committee for the Protection and Care for Children; and the Philippines, the National Statistical and Coordination Board.

27. All countries in the region have complete data for 1990 for all seven major Summit goals, but only one third have data for the supporting goals. Over one half of the countries in the region stated that the major goals and 12 supporting goals had already been achieved or were achievable, while all were unanimous that all goals have high political appeal. Almost all countries in the region have programmes supporting the seven major goals, and about one half for the 20 supporting goals. Only one third of countries in the region were able to set medium-term targets for the major and supporting goals, but most expected to be able to do so once the national programmes of action had been prepared by end of 1991.

III. REGIONAL SERVICES

A. Planning, evaluation and monitoring services

28. In 1991, the East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) provided major support for country programme preparation and for the development of master plans of operations in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific island countries.

29. In March 1991, EAPRO organized an "Asia strategy meeting" for Summit follow-up and, in July 1991, a regional consultation on national programmes of action. The consultation, attended by 75 ministerial and official delegates from 11 countries, formally adopted a "Commitment for Action" to prepare national programmes of action by the end of 1991. EAPRO also published technical guidelines on monitoring the goals for children and development in the 1990s and baseline and trend analysis for countries in the region.

B. Health and nutrition advisory support services

30. Regional advisory support services were provided to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Pakistan, Viet Nam, Malaysia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Papua New Guinea, the South Pacific island countries, Mongolia and Thailand. The regional adviser also served as a member of United Nations fact-finding missions to Cambodia to assess the immediate needs of the Cambodian people in the fields of health and nutrition. The regional office organized a regional study seminar on primary health care (PHC), a regional workshop on community nutrition and several short study tours to Thailand. In collaboration with the Government of Japan, an evaluation of the PHC project of the Institute for Health Development of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was also undertaken in 1991.

31. The regional adviser also worked with a WHO team in the organization of a joint consultative meeting on programme matters, held at Vientiane on 12 and 13 February 1991. EAPRO was also represented at the WHO Global Advisory Group Meeting on Immunization, held at Antalya, Turkey, from 14 to 18 October.

C. Education advisory services

32. Early in 1991, an all-Asia strategy meeting for basic education was organized to examine strategies for the implementation of Education for All goals. At mid-year, the regional adviser for education was appointed and began a round of country visits to examine education projects, assess needs and plan a programme of support for 1992. A regional training workshop for education programme officers was held in October.

D. Regional personnel, administration and supply operations

33. The regional office provides a broad range of advisory and support services to country offices in the region in the areas of personnel management, training, administrative and financial systems and procedures. Advisory missions visited the Republic of Korea, Myanmar, the Philippines, China and Malaysia. The regional office provided support for supply operations and training in the region and for global procurement valued at $7.4 million in the year from July 1990 to July 1991. Special assistance was also provided for flood emergencies in Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Bangladesh.

E. Inter-agency and regional institutional cooperation

34. During 1991, UNICEF cooperated with ESCAP in many areas, including several inter-agency task forces on Cambodia, rural development, water and sanitation, youth activities, disability prevention and human resources development. It also participated in a forum and inter-agency meeting on women in development. UNICEF cooperated with ESCAP in organizing the

ministerial-level conference on social development, held at Manila in early October 1991. UNICEF and the Asian Development Bank have agreed to establish two annual consultations on health and education priorities in the region, the first to take place at Manila in January 1992.

35. UNICEF and WHO organized a two-day regional director's consultation on problems and programmes for the Lao People's Democratic Republic and jointly participated in several meetings, training courses and consultations. The appointment of an education adviser has formalized more frequent and regular consultations with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on issues and programmes of mutual interest.